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# She's back!

## Margaret Cho talks about new music and comedy



**Trump's Kennedy  
Center cuts DC  
Gay Men's Chorus**

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The focus of QNotes is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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## For the love of art

Artistic leadership in our community: Adam Santalla Pierce of the Arts and Science Council and Todd Smith, Executive Director of the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, talk about their careers and what we can expect from Charlotte's cultural Arts scene.



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## Classic Cinema you should know

Queer icon Diana Ross and late gay actor Anthony Perkins gave it their all in the 1970s cinema flop "Mahogany," but today the movie is a cult classic. Join us as we revisit a number of lesser recognized cinema gems starring divas and queer icons from the past.



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# Trump's attacks on trans Americans encourage NC GOP

Nine years after HB2, North Carolina Republicans feel more emboldened than ever



by Taylor Heeden Larkins  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Since the inauguration of Donald Trump on Jan. 20, numerous executive orders attacking the rights of trans Americans have been signed and implemented. Each one of these orders has essentially placed a bullseye on the backs of millions of queer, trans and gender-nonconforming Americans who want nothing more than to go about their day-to-day lives without fear of being verbally or physically assaulted or berated.

On his first day in office, Trump signed the "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government" executive order, mandating that all federal agencies must define gender strictly based on biological sex assigned at birth.

The order states:

"Across the country, ideologues who deny the biological reality of sex have increasingly used legal and other socially coercive means to permit men to self-identify as women and gain access to intimate single-sex spaces and activities designed for women, from women's domestic abuse shelters to women's workplace showers ... This unhealthy road is paved by an ongoing and purposeful attack against the ordinary and longstanding use and understanding of biological and scientific terms, replacing the immutable biological reality of sex with an internal, fluid, and subjective sense of self unmoored from biological facts. Invalidating the true and biological category of 'woman' improperly transforms laws and policies designed to protect sex-based opportunities into laws and policies that undermine them, replacing long standing, cherished legal rights and values with an identity-based, inchoate social concept."

Other than being filled with random SAT-level vocabulary words in an attempt to paint the Commander in Chief as articulate and intelligent (when has Trump ever used words like "inchoate" or "immutable?"), the order also states federal documents, including passports and visas, no longer allow individuals to self-select their gender identity. Furthermore, Trump's first order also restricts trans individuals from accessing single-sex facilities aligning with their gender identity in federally funded spaces.

Trans folks are already feeling the impact of this policy — in fact, HBO Euphoria star and openly trans actress Hunter Schafer took to TikTok to show her renewed passport changed her gender marker from the "F" for female to "M" for male, despite her other documents having the female marker since her transition.

"My initial reaction to this, because our president is a lot of talk, was like, 'I'll believe it when I see it' ... and today I saw it on my new passport," she said. "I'm not making this post to fearmonger, or to create drama or receive consolation. I don't need it. But I do think it's worth posting to sort of note the reality of the

situation — I was shocked ... I guess I'm just sort of scared of the way this stuff gets slowly implemented because things just sort of start happening, as we've seen in historical rises in fascism. I just feel like it's important to share that it's not just talk."

A week after his first order targeting trans folks, Trump reinstated his policy barring trans individuals from serving in the U.S. military. The administration justified this ban by asserting that being transgender is incompatible with the military's standards of honor and discipline.

The verbiage of this order likens identifying as trans to "many mental and physical health conditions" which are "incompatible with active duty," including conditions that require substantial medication or medical treatment, bipolar and related disorders, eating disorders, suicidal tendencies and conditions requiring prior psychiatric hospitalization.

"Consistent with the military mission and longstanding DoD policy, expressing a false "gender identity" divergent from an individual's sex cannot satisfy the rigorous standards necessary for military service," the order states. "Beyond the hormonal and surgical medical interventions involved, adoption of a gender identity inconsistent with an individual's sex conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life. A man's assertion that he is a woman, and his requirement that others honor this falsehood, is not consistent with the humility and selflessness required of a service member."

Just a day later, Trump moved his executive attacks onto trans youth with the "Protect Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation" executive order, in

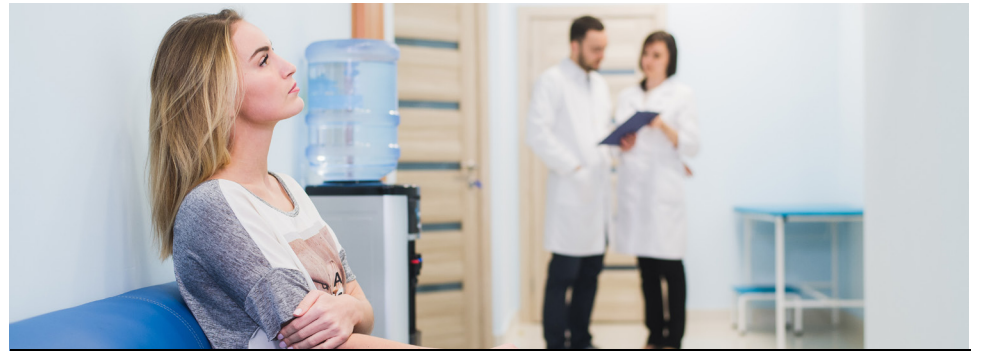


an attempt to eliminate federal support for gender-affirming medical treatments for minors.

This life-saving treatment for trans youth has been barred in North Carolina since 2023 with House Bill 808, which also banned the use of state funds and Medicaid dollars from being used for such care, directly or indirectly. Doctors providing such care could face civil penalties and lose their medical licenses under the new law.

The Trump order, however, has made it more difficult for trans youth in North Carolina and other states with similar bans to travel to receive care. Hospital systems across the country have started to halt patient intakes, and some have even stopped providing any form of gender-affirming treatment to youth out of fear of losing federal funding.

On Feb. 5, Trump signed yet another order: the "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports" executive order prohibiting transgender women and girls from participating in female sports at federally-funded schools and institutions. If athletic organizations or schools refuse to adhere to the Trump order, they run the risk of



Following Trump's executive orders hospital systems across the country have started to halt patient intakes for gender-affirming care.

being in violation of Title IX, which could jeopardize access to federal funding.

This policy has faced legal challenges from transgender athletes and advocacy groups, arguing the order itself is a Title IX violation as it enshrines discrimination into national policy.

These executive orders have sparked numerous lawsuits from civil rights organizations and state governments. For instance, San Francisco-based health and LGBTQ+ rights groups have filed federal lawsuits challenging the administration's actions, asserting that they violate constitutional rights and endanger essential services for transgender and non-binary communities.

As legal battles continue, the future of these executive orders remains uncertain. The outcomes of these challenges will significantly influence the rights and recognition of transgender individuals in the United States.

## North Carolina's own history with legislative attacks against trans folks

In regard to trans issues, North Carolina has had its own time on the wrong side of history spotlight when the GOP moved to pass House Bill 2 (HB2), which barred trans folks from using the bathroom correlating with their gender identity. Back then, the ban brought extensive backlash to the state — most specifically in the form of losing nearly \$4 billion in economic development.

The General Assembly quickly moved to revise the bill to remove the language regarding trans folks and bathrooms, but nine years later, the song hasn't just changed its tune — it's completely changed genres. Trump's approval of policies targeting and attacking trans Americans sends the message to North Carolina Republicans that they were "right all along," and if you think that's an exaggeration, take it from the mouth of Matt Mercer, a spokesman for the North Carolina Republican Party.

"It's a vindication that North Carolina legislators were right to confront this issue, and it's unfortunate that it took seeing women athletes injured or defeated to raise the alarms that biological males do not belong in women's spaces or sports," Mercer said. "This is a 70/30 (polling) issue right now because it's rooted in what most people believe to be right versus wrong."

Republicans in North Carolina are feeling vindicated, validated and those who lost their political careers due to the HB2 backlash are now praised within the

party as martyrs for a cause. Now, they're aiming to strip the powers of fellow elected officials who oppose their agenda.

North Carolina's attorney general has the ability to sue the federal government and throughout the state's history, the attorney general has maintained that power to serve as a check and balance to the federal government.

In fact, current N.C. Attorney General Jeff Jackson (a Mecklenburg-based progressive Democrat) has filed four lawsuits against the Trump administration over executive orders regarding freezing federal funds, revoking funds from health care institutions, financial data privacy and birthright citizenship.

However, with a gerrymandered, Republican and MAGA-loyalist General Assembly majority, North Carolina GOP leaders are attempting to strip Jackson's power through their own proposed bill. Their goal: Make it impossible for Jackson or other elected Democrats to do the job they were sent to do.

"The attorney general has had that ability and that authority in the past, and it's only by recent action that this power is being taken away without any clear, concrete reasons other than to try to push a specific agenda," N.C. Rep. Renée Price (D-Caswell, Orange) said in a recent interview with The Daily Tar Heel. "I appreciate having different points of view, and I like to listen to people who come from a different background. However, what's happening right now is more retaliation."

North Carolina Republicans are just getting started, and with four more years until there's potential for national reprieve from the MAGA agenda, we need to do everything in our power to voice opposition to their attempts to strip our individual rights.

No matter if your representative has a "D" or "R" next to their name, contact their office. Send a letter. Fax their legislative assistant. Tell them just how these policies have harmed North Carolinians in the past, and nine years passing isn't going to change that. If you are able to and have the resources, the North Carolina General Assembly falls under open meetings law and all votes must be taken in open session and be made available to the public. You are allowed to attend these meetings, and you are allowed to submit comments on proposed bills. Often, bills will have to go through committees before being voted on, and those committees will receive public comment. Speak at those meetings and let your voice be heard. ::

# The John F. Kennedy Center and the Stonewall Monument join the list of organizations affected by Trump's administration

The latest victims of Donald Trump's actions hit at the heart of the nation's queer and creative communities



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

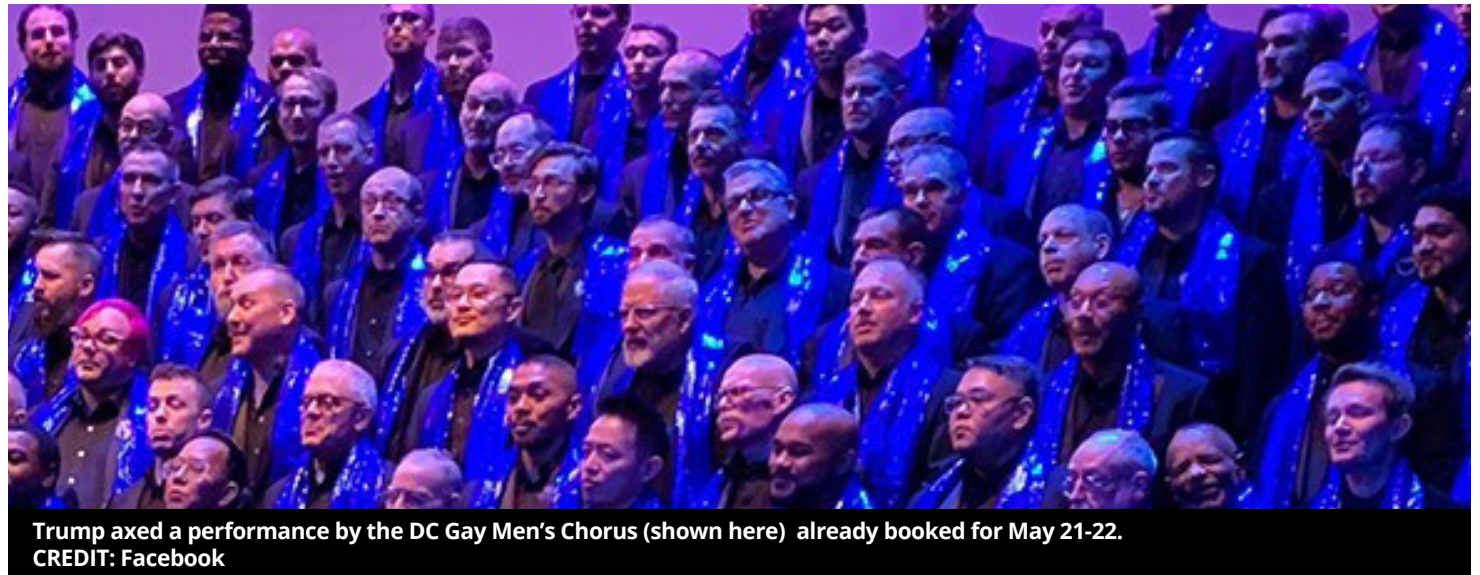
As the days and weeks have passed since Donald Trump's return to the White House, organizations both inside and out of the Washington D.C. area have seen disturbingly quick changes to their infrastructures. Whether happily marching in line with the new administration's attacks on the most marginalized in the LGBTQ+ community, or getting out of the way of supporting the new regime and being replaced by someone who does, the inner workings of many governmental institutions already look very different in a matter of weeks.

Prominent institutions that have been impacted by Project 2025, Trump and the Elon Musk-led pop-up-style "office" of DOGE ("Department Of Government Efficiency") include USAID, the FBI and the CDC. By mid February, the National Park Service joined the list, when it removed references to transgender individuals and people who identify as queer from the National Park Service website for the Stonewall National Monument. Not only were the words "transgender" and "queer" deleted from previous text on the site, but much like the U.S. government's travel page, every representative letter aside from LGB has been removed from the abbreviation.

Representatives of the present-day Stonewall Inn, located across the street from where the monument sits in a park in Manhattan's Greenwich Village section, and The Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative (a nonprofit organization associated with the historic bar), angrily condemned the changes in a few joint statements.

"This decision to erase the word 'transgender' is a deliberate attempt to erase our history and marginalize the very people who paved the way for many victories we have achieved as a community."

Timothy Leonard, the Northeast program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, a group that



Trump axed a performance by the DC Gay Men's Chorus (shown here) already booked for May 21-22. CREDIT: Facebook

advocates for the National Park System and pushed for the Stonewall monument, also expressed displeasure at the shifts in messaging. "Erasing letters or web pages does not change the history or the contributions of our transgender community members at Stonewall or anywhere else. History was made here and civil rights were earned because of Stonewall," Leonard said.

Around that same time, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the national cultural center of the United States, ousted the center's president Deborah F. Rutter, along with the 18 members of the organization's board. Each board member was replaced with the likes of Trump's chief of staff, Susie Wiles; Dan Scavino, a longtime Trump aide and Usha Vance, the wife of Vice President JD Vance. Once Trump's loyalists were all assembled in the formally filled seats, Trump himself was voted in as chairman of the center.

"Just last year, the Kennedy Center featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth — THIS WILL STOP," Trump posted on the his social media site Truth Social on Feb. 10. In other anti-LGBTQ+ culture attacks, the Kennedy Center has also canceled an upcoming performance by

the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C., which was scheduled to take place May 21-22, in conjunction with World Pride 2025.

Jeffrey Weisner, a member of the National Symphony Orchestra, recently posted on Facebook a response to the cancellation:

"We were scheduled to perform for the first time with Gay Men's Chorus of Washington On May 21st as part of World Pride in Washington, D.C. 2025. The concert was abruptly canceled without explanation and removed from the KC [Kennedy Center] website. However, they forgot to scrub it from the search engine.

"This post is for any LGBT folks who think that the Trump admin isn't targeting our entire community," he continued. "Expect moves to remove us from anti-discrimination laws, plus lawsuits aimed at giving the Supreme Court the chance to overturn decisions that gave us rights."

Trump told reporters that his administration "took over the Kennedy Center" because "we didn't like what they were showing and various other things," adding "we have, I guess, a whole new group of people going in . . . and we're going to make sure that it's good and it's not going to be woke."

While describing the shows presented at the national venue as "terrible" and "a disgrace," Trump also admitted that he's never been to the center and "didn't want to go" because "there was nothing [he] wanted to see."

The outcry from the Trump regime's hostile takeover of the Kennedy Center can be heard inside the center as well as out. Prolific names that held positions in the organization, such as soprano superstar Renée Fleming, singer and songwriter Ben Folds, and Shonda Rhimes, creator of many noteworthy shows such as "Grey's Anatomy," resigned from their roles as artistic advisors and treasurer of the center.

"I've treasured the bipartisan support for this institution as a beacon of America at our best," Fleming said in a statement. "I hope the Kennedy Center continues to flourish and serve the passionate and diverse audience in our nation's capital and across the country."

The Kennedy Center has historically been run by bipartisan boards in the past. As with many of the constant firings in the U.S. government after inauguration day, the ousting of the center's entire board, whose elected officials normally serve six-year terms, has no previous precedent. ::

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# Bar patron suffers near-fatal stabbing at Woodshed

Late into the evening on Feb. 9, a man was stabbed by one of the security guards posted at West Charlotte's Woodshed Bar.

Just before midnight, officers responded to a call about a stabbing from the LGBTQ+ bar on Queen City Drive. When they arrived, they found a 30-year-old man with serious knife wounds. The victim, identified as Rod Jackson, was taken to a local hospital with life-threatening injuries, per one of the medics familiar with the incident.

Court paperwork and a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department police report confirmed the perpetrator to be 34-year-old Christopher Harris.

Jackson said things started as a verbal argument between him and Harris. The bar was crowded and Harris told him to get out of the way, the victim told WSOC of the incident. "He was like, 'You can leave,' and I was like, 'I'm not going nowhere. We just paid for a drink,'" Jackson said. Things turned physical as tensions escalated, and the two were separated.

Witnesses said other bar employees escorted Harris outside. Jackson believes someone let Harris back in through another door. "As soon as I touched the door, he was back inside at the door," Jackson said. "He just went to stabbing me."

Found by the medical staff tending to the victim, Jackson had two deep cuts

in the torso. "She said if he would have probably got a little deeper, I probably could have bled to death," Jackson told reporters from his hospital bed. "It did get my large intestine so they had to cut my stomach open."

After the incident, the owner of The Woodshed, Timothy Lee, said he reached out to Jackson to offer any support possible to the victim.

Lee said Harris was contracted through a third party. The owner also said he does not hire armed security so Harris should not have had a weapon, as security on the premises' only responsibility was to wand people and maybe conduct the occasional pat down to keep weapons like a knife out.

Jackson said he couldn't understand why Harris allegedly got so irate and violent.

"I've never had an issue with him, me and him never exchanged words," Jackson said. "From what I'm hearing, he's had numerous



The Woodshed  
CREDIT: Facebook/Woodshed

altercations with people to where people have reported that he's real hostile."

Harris is currently being held at the Mecklenburg County jail under no bond. ::  
—Jonathan Golian

# Utah wants to ban Pride flags from public schools and government buildings

A bill was reintroduced into Utah's State Legislature on Thursday, Feb. 13, that would prohibit the rainbow Pride flag and others flags from being displayed on public school campuses and government buildings.

House Bill 77, written by Utah Representative Trevor Lee, aims to ban designs other than the exemptions noted further into the legislation from school and government grounds around the state. The flags that would be allowed are for the state of Utah, the American standard red, white and blue with stars and stripes, military flags, those representing other countries, Native American tribal and official flags for colleges and universities. The bill would also allow "a historic version of a flag ... that is temporarily displayed

for educational purposes," such as the Confederate and Nazi party banners.

Speaking at a hearing conducted by the state's House Education Committee, Lee tried to paint the bill as being protective over the youth in his state.

"We are starting to see increasingly more hostile-type interactions between different political factions that we have within our society, and that is no different than what we're starting to see a lot within our education system," Lee told the committee. "Our schools should be a place for children to learn, to not feel like they are being pushed or seen as agendas in one way other another as it pertains to political beliefs."

When questioned about other flags that have especially stark histories attached to them, according to the Salt

Lake Tribune, Lee countered that "There is a difference between displaying flags in curriculum when you're teaching on them. You don't censor history here. That's not what we're doing."

"You may have a Nazi flag. You may have a Confederate flag, and so you are allowed to display those flags for the purpose of those lesson plans. If it is part of the curriculum, then that is OK."

During the hearing on the bill, Millie Dworkin, a senior at Salt Lake Center for Science Education, called the ban "unconstitutional," as reported by LGBTQ Nation.

"You ... argue semantics, but you all know this is wrong and immoral. Queer people commit suicide at a higher rate than everybody else," she said. "This is not because they are inherently prone to commit suicide due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is because of how they are treated. If you pass this, you will have queer blood on your hands."

The amended bill will be heard on the full House floor after the committee voted in favor of the legislation, with the committee's two Democrats, Reps. Sahara Hayes and Carol Moss, casting



As the Utah legislature votes to ban Pride flags on all government buildings and schools, concerns are rising across the country other states may follow.

the only "nays."

Last year, unsuccessful attempts to ban the Pride flag were made in Florida and Tennessee. Similar bans may be on the way in other states, as evidenced at a Massachusetts high school, where students spoke out against a proposed flag policy that would remove Pride, Black Lives Matter and Juneteenth flags from school grounds on the same day of the Utah hearing. ::

—Jonathan Golian

# References to trans, queer and others wiped from gov't websites

Following executive orders signed by Donald Trump shortly after returning to the president's office, LGBTQI has been removed from multiple government websites.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people have long been grouped together into the short-hand lettering, being displayed not only in cultural media, but on U.S. government websites. However, after the two-gender expression executive order was signed on Day 1 of the new administration, called "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government," the acronym was either entirely scrubbed from, or cut to only say "LGB" on sites where it previously read "LGBTQI."

The change is immediately visible on

the *travel.state.gov* website. Posted under a header that reads "LGB Travelers," a paragraph details dangers lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens may face abroad without any mention of those identifying as transgender or other established classifications in the LGBTQ+ community.

"LGB travelers can face special challenges abroad," the section reads. "Laws and attitudes in some countries may affect safety and ease of travel. Many countries do not recognize same-sex marriage. Many countries also only recognize the male and female sex markers in passports and do not have IT systems at ports of entry that can accept other sex markers. About 70 countries still consider consensual same-sex relations a crime. In some of these countries, individuals who engage

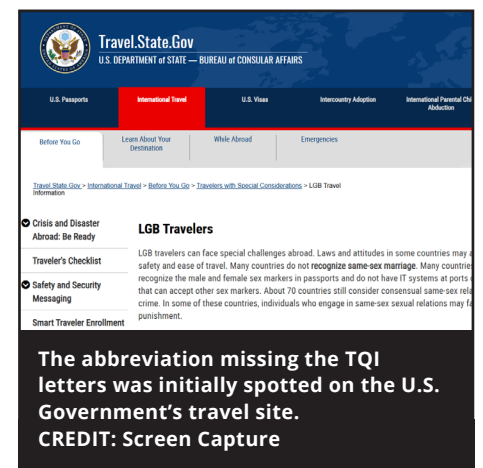
in same-sex sexual relations may face severe punishment."

Similarly, aside from the U.S. travel site, a State Department web page providing "Resources for LGBTQI+ Prospective Adoptive Parents" now just reads "LGB Prospective Adoptive Parents."

When asked for comment on the changes to and the removal of web pages mentioning the LGBTQ+ community, the new administration's spokesperson for the Office of Personnel Management shared a memo directing all federal agencies last week to implement Trump's "gender ideology" order. The directive instructed agencies to "Take down all outward facing media (websites, social media accounts, etc.) that inculcate or promote gender ideology."

In a statement the day after Trump signed the order and shortly after LGBTQ+ related information started to be removed from the White House website, the LGBTQ+ media advocacy group GLAAD accused Trump of censorship.

"President Trump claims to be a strong proponent of freedom of speech, yet he is clearly committed to censorship of any information containing or related to LGBTQ Americans and issues that



The abbreviation missing the TQI letters was initially spotted on the U.S. Government's travel site.  
CREDIT: Screen Capture

we face," CEO Sarah Kate Ellis said in a statement. "This action proves the Trump administration's goal of making it as difficult as possible for LGBTQ Americans to find federal resources or otherwise see ourselves reflected under his presidency. Sadly for him, our community is more visible than ever; and this pathetic attempt to diminish and remove us will again prove unsuccessful."::

—Jonathan Golian

# HRC North Carolina hosts its yearly dinner for 2025 in Charlotte

The Human Rights Campaign's North Carolina Chapter came together Feb. 8 for their annual dinner meeting at Charlotte's Uptown Le Meridien location.

Opening doors to ticket holders around 5 p.m., the yearly occasion reportedly welcomed more than 300 guests. The format for the evening allowed for an open dress code, with HRC's guidelines stating the importance of just being there versus meeting a certain bar for entry.

Once the main event kicked off

around 6:30 p.m., familiar faces inside and out of HRC made the occasion to speak on the challenges coming in the year ahead. The highlighted speakers from the night include Kelley Robinson, HRC's president; Anderson Clayton, the NC Democratic Party Chair; Kimberly Locke, a tenured singer and advocate for raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and breast cancer; Dana Goldberg, an openly queer comic as well as regular attendee to HRC's yearly events; Thorgy Thor, a New York based drag queen and

violinist who previously made waves on various seasons of RuPaul's Drag Race; and HRC Co-Chairs Dan Cary and Sarah Castleman, representing HRC's North Carolina chapter.

While many details from the full night's schedule still currently remain for those that attended the event, HRC North Carolina expressed immense joy within a short recap posted along their social media channels.

"What a night!," the post reads. "We are still processing how amazing and special our dinner was last night. The people, speakers, performers and overall vibe of the night was exactly what we needed! We will post more pics and thoughts in a few days but for now we just want to say thank you to each of you who came out to support our continued fight for equality in North Carolina."::

—Jonathan Golian



Jamie Monroe, Thorgy Thor and Delighted Tohere performed at this year's dinner for HRC North Carolina.

CREDIT: Facebook

# Religious figure and LGBTQ+ rights activist killed in South Africa

A prolific queer figure in the Muslim community was killed Feb. 15.

Muhsin Hendricks, a man dubbed the world's first openly gay imam (a person that leads prayers in a mosque), was shot dead on Saturday morning. The fatality occurred in the coastal city of Gqeberha, South Africa, where the car that Hendricks was riding in had been ambushed.

"Two unknown suspects with covered faces got out of the vehicle and started firing multiple shots at the vehicle," police said in a statement. While not confirmed by official sources, the incident took place directly after the imam had reportedly officiated at a lesbian wedding.

Hendricks had devoted his life to

promoting gay rights and tolerance for LGBTQ+ Muslims. One of his greatest achievements toward this cause was his founding of the Al-Ghurbaah Foundation in 2018. The nonprofit provides support services for Muslims discriminated against for their sexual orientation, as well as help for Muslims around the world to reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation and gender identity. Hendricks also ran the mosque Masjidul Ghurbaah in Cape Town alongside his foundation, which confirmed his murder to the public.

Julia Ehrt, executive director at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA),

called on the authorities to thoroughly investigate "what we fear may be a hate crime.

"He supported and mentored so many people in South Africa and around the world in their journey to reconcile with their faith, and his life has been a testament to the healing that solidarity across communities can bring in everyone's lives," she said.

During his lifetime, Hendricks had challenged traditional interpretations of Islam and championed a more compassionate, inclusive faith through his work. Despite South Africa being the first country in the world to protect people from sexual orientation discrimination, along with legalizing same-sex marriage in 2006, intolerance and prejudice are still rampant through the nation. Hendricks came out as a gay man in 1996 and was prepared to lead the effort for potential changes to come.

Reverend Jide Macaulay, an openly gay Anglican minister and queer activist out of Nigeria, described Hendricks' death as "truly heartbreaking."



Imam Muhsin Hendricks speaks to followers at Masjidul Ghurbaah in South Africa.

CREDIT: Facebook

"Your leadership, courage and unwavering dedication to inclusive faith communities have left an indelible mark," he said. ::

—Jonathan Golian

# Judge orders restoration of HIV and trans health websites shut down by Trump

On Monday, Feb. 10, a federal judge ordered the restoration of the websites and data pertaining to the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Food and Drug Administration as the cases over each organization continue. Each online channel had been scrubbed in observance of President Trump's executive order on gender ideology.

U.S. District Judge John Bates agreed to grant a temporary restraining order sought by the non-profit group Doctors for America (DFA), a progressive advocacy group representing physicians. In their argument, the organization explained that their members used the various websites when treating patients and conducting research. The claim asserted that the removal of them by the Department of Health and Human

Services and its components not only hampers their daily work, but also violates federal law.

Bates, in his granting of the restraining order, found that the challengers were likely to succeed in their claims that the Department Health and Human Services, CDC and FDA acted unlawfully when they stripped medical information from public-facing websites.

"It bears emphasizing who ultimately bears the harm of defendants' actions: everyday Americans, and most acutely, underprivileged Americans, seeking healthcare," he wrote in his opinion. Citing declarations from two doctors filed in the case, Bates said if they "cannot provide these individuals the care they need (and deserve) within the scheduled and often limited time frame, there is

a chance that some individuals will not receive treatment, including for severe, life-threatening conditions.

"The public thus has a strong interest in avoiding these serious injuries to the public health. No backend remedy could ameliorate the inability to provide all required care during an appointment time to a patient who cannot return in the future."

The order followed a 90-minute hearing Monday on DFA's bid to win the restraining order that not only would restore the online pages, but also block the agencies "from removing or substantially modifying" other datasets to implement the executive order.

The Department of Health and Human Services, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had until midnight Tuesday to bring back the specific web pages cited in the lawsuit.

As of this writing, some information has been returned to the websites, but with the following disclaimer from the Trump administration: "Per a court order, HHS is required to restore this website as of 11:59 PM on Feb. 11, 2025. Any information on this page promoting gender ideology



Members from Doctors For America at the Senate hearing for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s nomination as Health Secretary on Jan. 30.

CREDIT: Facebook / Doctors For America

is extremely inaccurate and disconnected from the immutable biological reality that there are two sexes, male and female. The Trump Administration rejects gender ideology and condemns the harms it causes to children, by promoting their chemical and surgical mutilation, and to women, by depriving them of their dignity, safety, well-being, and opportunities. This page does not reflect biological reality and therefore the Administration and this Department reject it." ::

—Jonathan Golian

# North Carolinians mark Presidents' Day with protests at State Capitol

Protesters call for impeachment of Trump, removal of Musk  
by Clayton Henkel/ NC Newsline

Hundreds of North Carolinians used the federal holiday to protest the actions of President Donald Trump and Elon Musk. "Make America Think Again" and "Impeach President Musk" were just some of the signs demonstrators carried as they marched for two hours around the state capitol Monday afternoon. Other protesters shared their disapproval of recent and abrupt cuts to USAID, the threatened dismantling of the US

Department of Education, and efforts by the Trump administration to erase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies from schools and state agencies. Similar 50501 rallies – representing "50 Protests, 50 States, 1 Day" – were held across the country.

This brief and photo gallery (images by Clayton Henkel) appear courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. :



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## Erasure Is Violence

This moment calls for more than visibility

by Freedom Center of Social Justice Staff

We're in a moment where the challenges can feel both familiar and overwhelming. As we look to our collective history and elders for guidance, we must honor the vital role that trans and gender non-conforming individuals have played in moving LGBTQ+ rights forward. The legacy left behind by those who have fought before us reminds us that trans people were



central to the very beginning of the modern fight for equality. While we celebrate and remember the fights of the past, we must also recognize the ways in which trans individuals continue to face systematic erasure, exclusion, and harm, including within queer spaces.

The Stonewall riots of 1969 were a turning point in LGBTQ+ history. While it is often remembered as a pivotal moment for the gay rights movement, it was led by a group of marginalized individuals, including transgender women of color like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. These trans activists stood at the frontlines of a rebellion against injustice. The current administration's decisions to edit and erase the references and language that included both trans and queer individuals are direct attacks on the Trans and GNC community and most importantly blatant erasure of their contributions. This erasure of trans people's histories has been a constant throughout history but it is incredibly transparent in current times, despite the fact that trans individuals remain at the forefront of LGBTQ+ activism. Their role in shaping our movement is undeniable, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that their voices are heard, celebrated, and honored in the present and future.

Transgender people are under attack in numerous ways, from discriminatory policies to increasing rates of violence. The current political climate, marked by a surge in anti-trans legislation, poses a threat to the safety and dignity of trans individuals across the United States. At a time when transgender youth face unprecedented levels of discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, we must remind ourselves that the struggle for trans rights is far from over. The rhetoric and decisions of politicians have impacts far beyond the ballot box - trans people are being targeted across this country. The recent torture and subsequent murder of Sam Nordquist, a Black trans man, reminds us of this stark reality.

According to Sam's mother, Linda, he "would give you the shirt off his back, very kind, loved his family, loved his nieces and nephew, very outgoing, worked hard." It's reported that Sam Nordquist suffered months of torture, suffering before his death. Political actions have real word consequences, normalizing hate towards Trans people. It is for folks like Sam that we must continue the fight, that we can't waver in our support for Trans rights, Trans lives, and Trans futures.

We must be allies and co-conspirators in our daily lives, whether it's at our work, our faith community, or our home. We must disrupt and speak out against hateful rhetoric that targets Trans people or their families. We must support Trans-led organizations and initiatives. Action is

possible in the here and now, and we must be present in this moment. Lives depend on it. Our Trans siblings and neighbors can't wait for the next election, we must support them now.

We must work to address the systemic issues that allow such discrimination, harassment, and violence to thrive. We owe to Sam and the countless others who have suffered and who are being targeted to ensure their stories are heard and to avoid history from repeating itself. We must learn from their experiences and build a world where every trans person can live safely and authentically.

Whether it's Sylvia Rivera or Marsha P. Johnson, trans people were leaders of the modern queer liberation movement from its inception. Their contributions to our collective history cannot and should not be erased. While we continue to honor and uplift the voices of cisgender LGBTQ+ individuals, it is essential that we give equal recognition to the trans people who have fought, and continue to fight, for justice and equality. This is particularly important in light of the historical and ongoing violence faced by transgender women of color, who experience the highest rates of discrimination, assault, and murder within the LGBTQ+ community.

We honor the trans leaders who came before us, and we must amplify and support the trans leaders of today. They are fighting against harmful policies and pushing for greater inclusivity and equality. The trans rights movement is a fight for liberation for all, one that intersects with issues of race, gender, class, and more. We must continue to stand in solidarity with our trans siblings, particularly trans people of color, and take action to ensure they are not erased from our history or our future. The Freedom Center for Social Justice has been committed to Trans liberation since our founding, and we're excited to announce our Trans Advisory Council (TAC) that will continue to guide us to meet this moment.

In this fight, it is important to remember that trans people have always been at the forefront of the struggle for justice. They have fought for our rights as a community and for the rights of marginalized groups everywhere. The trans community's history is one of resilience, resistance, and strength. It is our duty to honor that history, to amplify trans voices, and to work towards a world where all trans people, regardless of their race, gender identity, or background, can live authentically and without fear.

As we honor the legacy of trans activists and the contributions of transgender women of color, let us also commit ourselves to the ongoing work of ensuring that trans people are seen, heard, and celebrated. We must continue to build inclusive communities where transgender people are not only visible but valued. This work is essential to the progress of our collective movement. Together, we can create a world where trans people are fully included in our fight for justice, where their lives and contributions are recognized, and where they can live authentically and freely.

Transgender people have always been here, and they always will be. Our fight for equality and liberation is not just for the past, it is for us who are currently living and fighting through these turbulent times, and it is for the future, one in which trans people are fully seen, heard, and embraced. As we continue to honor their legacies and amplify their voices, let us also remember that the fight is not over, and the work continues. We will not allow our trans siblings to be erased, and we will keep fighting for their rights, dignity, and humanity.



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# NOW: Can the National Organization for Women show us the path to fight for the future?

Even as Trump pushes to divide the nation, NOW continues to push for a better tomorrow



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Actions taken by Donald Trump's administration in the first month have had an immense ripple impact on daily life throughout the nation.

The damage goes further than just the executive orders, although Trump's daily scribbled commands, and Musk's additional efforts to enforce his own agenda have caused increasing anxiety.

Almost all of the intended effects have had particular targets, namely the minority groups throughout the nation and anyone that doesn't fit the image of white, cis and male identifying.

Here's a look where we are at the end of February: DEI programs are being dismantled throughout the United States, as directed through enforcement of the "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" order. Not only does it affect the LGBTQ+ community, but also women, people of color, the disabled, veterans and anyone that doesn't look like the men in power. From Trump's prior term in 2017, the block on federal funding for abortion care, making the assets for life-planning less accessible and possible solutions less safe; The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or the SAVE Act, which is nothing short of a plan to upend many of the methods we use to vote in our elections today for those who don't have citizenship paperwork at the ready.

It is these setbacks, rights we have previously known and and felt

comfortable with, and watching them slowly erode bit by bit, that are truly frightening. In these moments, the grassroots group NOW, (National Organization for Women), offers ways we can reverse the chaotic direction the United States is taking, and band together for positive progress.

NOW, over the course of nearly 60-years since it was originally founded in 1966, has been a bastion of action for women and girls, but also those disaffected in the queer community. In 2025, the organization has spread across all 50 states from its base in Washington D.C, founding hundreds of chapters all over the nation, including one here in Charlotte.

As described on NOW's main website, the leadership's motivations and purposes for charting forward are to "promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social, political and economic life."

From their long history working with both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism, from the organizations most iconic demonstrations and marches throughout its lifetime, what can we as a community take from their actions in the modern era?

A look at their social media offers enough evidence to suggest the organization is active and prepared to take on the current administration. While they have stepped back from X/ Twitter, the organization's Facebook and Instagram pages are updated daily. As with many civil rights and political action organizations, NOW has remained on top of developments with the current administration and keeping its nearly



An early NOW protest in the late 1960s addressing the Vietnam War, equality in employment and voting rights.

CREDIT: Facebook

quarter-million followers up to date.

Even before Trump's second inauguration, NOW's President Christian Nunes has made sure her voice and words were heard on the organization's platforms. It comes as no surprise that, after Jan. 20, there has been an uptick on how often Nunes has engaged with political and national events taking place, all in response to the Trump administration's "flood the zone" tactics.

On the same day as Trump's inauguration, Nunes spoke out on what's at stake for our nation and how NOW will serve in the years going forward.

"Today, we are inaugurating a new president, after much heated politics. NOW members remain committed to the issues that matter to our health, our economic security and our safety. We can't go back, we won't go back. No matter what policies are put forward that threaten our safety, security and our

future, NOW will be on the front lines to push back.

"Since NOW's founding almost 60 years ago, our members have stayed on the front lines of the multi-issue fight for women's rights. Today, that means resistance to a culture of misogyny and toxic masculinity, and a permission structure for hate speech and discrimination. We will resist policies that further restrict women's right to a full range of health care, including reproductive care and access to abortion; to an economy that doesn't leave them behind; and to protection from gender-based violence, including cyber bullying and online deepfakes."

In one of their latest press releases NOW responded across the aisle to South Carolina Representative Nancy

Continued on next page

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# The Reproductive Rights Coalition

## An inside scoop on joys and challenges from the director



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

In 1973, a landmark Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, legalized abortion in the United States. The ruling established that the U.S. Constitution protects a person's right to privacy, which included the right to control pregnancy. Prior to that, real life horror stories were not uncommon: women being forced to bring pregnancies to term even in cases of incest, rape or medical harm to the mother while others found painful, unregulated and dangerous remedies.

Oftentimes, those remedies meant traveling states away from where they lived to have an unsanitary procedure performed in the basement or kitchen of a layperson. In the best cases, women avoided legal prosecution, social persecution and later carried unplanned pregnancies to term. In the worst cases, women died from hemorrhaging and botched procedures.

Recent legislation has threatened to return us to a *pre-Roe v. Wade* era, with seemingly little to no recourse. The *Roe v. Wade* overturn in 2022 gave the government back control over women's right to choose how to handle pregnancies and their own bodies. However, just like the years prior to 1973, community members and organizations who believe in the right of all women to make decisions about their reproductive health while having access to necessary health care have taken up the charge to help.

One such organization in the Carolinas is the Reproductive Rights Coalition.

RRC (The Reproductive Rights Coalition) is a nonprofit organization based in Charlotte, and almost completely staffed by volunteers. Founded in 2017, RRC has a goal of supporting, protecting and serving people who need reproductive health related services. Though that may already seem lofty, what the organization does (providing transportation, gas cards and other resources) is even greater.

Alexandria Carbone is the organization's

Executive Director. Originally from Pennsylvania, Carbone relocated to Charlotte about eight years ago. Initially, and upon her arrival in the Queen City she managed restaurants before transitioning to working for nonprofits. In 2019 she became involved with RRC as a volunteer - prompted by someone she met at a UNC-Charlotte Event.

Carbone tells the story of what prompted the relationship with RRC: "I attended UNCC's 'Black Mommas in Danger' event. It was a storytelling event focusing on the absolute inadequacies of Black maternal healthcare in our county.

"It was different - Black women telling stories of pregnancy and child birthing experiences. At the event I met Carol, a founding member of RRC. She was tabling at the event. She asked me if I was tired of just bitching [about these issues] or did I want to do something. With that motivation, shortly after I became an escort for women at clinics [and] Planned Parenthood."

Carbone emphasized the role and necessity for escorts at clinics offering reproductive services.

"At abortion clinics where antis [protestors] will stand outside and yell at folks, block access to entry and create a chaotic and confusing experience - an escort helps people safely get from the parking lot and to the door."

Yes, that is still a thing and one many of us have witnessed on the news, but not necessarily first hand.

To that Carbone added, "Let's get real about the south. The south has [traditionally] been post Roe. There's a difference between abortion being legal and abortion being accessible. Those are two very different things and I think overall, abortion organizations have changed to adopt a Reproductive Justice model - a term coined by black women in 1994. Some of those women went on to form SisterSong, an Atlanta based organization, which still functions today and continues to provide RRC with profound inspiration.

As for what challenges the RRC might be concerned about as a result of the current administration's efforts to dismantle years of progress in the areas of civil rights and its companion, DEI - Cardone stated:

"We have to take this administration seriously. Though they know banning abortion is not a popular idea, numbers show Americans support abortion access, they will use junk science and different language. They won't say "abortion ban" they will call it a "standard." And we've seen the [that] with medications like Mifepristone and Misoprostol (aka: the abortion pills). They won't ban them, [but] they will put in the work to frame these medications as dangerous to women. That's the approach to everything: LGBTQ folk, trans folk, undocumented immigrants, all 'dangers to women.' And we know when they say women they mean white women. It's the same play book that we saw in the civil rights era, the protection of white women."

Acknowledging the impact of the many recent directives, legislation and initiatives and Cardone expressed the importance of strategizing and planning for a future geared towards providing reproductive resources for those in need. As with most advocacy efforts, the battle can feel uphill. "South Carolina just introduced a bill that would make our work illegal there," she offered.

As for the future of the organization and any dreams Cardone might have, her position as Executive Director ends in June. "But that won't stop my passion or dedication to the work. I still see myself being part of RRC and am diligently seeking funding to assist our volunteers in continuing the work."

As the organization's only paid staff member she emphasized the importance of supporting those who work so tirelessly [as volunteers] to assist others. "If you're a progressive organization and your goal is to change the world, if you are not supporting your volunteers or the people who work for you - you've already lost.

"How can you change the world if you cannot change your approach to the people who work so hard for you?" She asked.

"For us, with such a small operating budget that means offering mileage and meal reimbursements. Through grants we've been awarded we've been able to offer our drivers, doula training and that is an investment in our community in general."

With this mindset Cardone hopes to see RRC continue to grow and acquire a Repro Van, a vehicle "that empowers people to



RRC Dir. and Change Agent Alexandria Cardone.  
CREDIT 1: Nii Yartey

take control of their own healthcare, learn about their bodies and provide support for people who need it; and more robust funding to hire more and expand our reach." In the meantime, she's working on practicing the self-care we all need while wading through the madness that has become our lives.

RRC's Executive Director describes that as follows: "Walking, moving my body and cooking at home. Engaging cool clients person to person is also how I maintain my sanity - changing lives in magnificent massive ways while ignoring the stuff I can't control. I can't control what executive order is coming down the pipeline but I can help a family get diapers or drive someone to get food." ::

### NOW, cant'd from previous page



NOW President Christian Nunes.  
CREDIT: Facebook

Mace, who recently took to the house floor to talk about physical abuse and predatory sexual behavior from an ex-fiance and three other unnamed men. Mace defined examples of the abuse that women endure on a regular basis, and demonstrated that any woman can be subject to violence and persecution.

"NOW is grateful that Rep. Mace found a safe place to talk about these assaults on the floor of the U.S. Congress," Nunes wrote in her reflection of the speech. "But for many women, that safe place is hard, if not impossible, to find.

"Rep. Mace's political views have nothing to do with her truth, and as a non-partisan advocacy organization working to advance women's rights and protect women's lives, NOW supports Rep. Mace's truth and salutes her courage."

In a collective piece named "Feminist

Leaders Speak Out on How to Protect Our Rights," published by *WomensMediaCenter.com*, author Marianne Schnall spoke with Nunes and other feminist activist leaders about methods to move forward in this troublesome new era.

In response to the question, Nunes offers battle-hardened words meant to fire up Schnall's readership, as well as her own base.

"We must keep fighting," Nunes charges. "After all, our foremothers didn't stop fighting when they were tired and worn out, thought they would fail, and wanted to give up. We must remember what they were willing to sacrifice for the movement, the fight and the rights we have now. We can find strength in that."

"I do know that NOW and our members won't sit still. We have seen a lot of change since NOW was founded

almost 60 years ago, but we still have much work to do."

To have been at the forefront of many historical turns in U.S. history, having organized women's rights marches through the 1960s into present day (at one point gathering over a million protesters for an event), it is inarguable that members and staff of NOW still feel passionate about what they do.

The fact that we can find such organizations who see the bigger vision is vital, as the mission for a better nation never ceases. For the foreseeable future, we must continuously find ways to fight back against repressive leaders in our government, and that notion is why organizations like NOW exist, to inspire into action those of us daring enough to advocate for that better tomorrow. ::

# 'Cleavage: Men, Women, and the Space Between Us'

Out In Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Qnotes Staff Writer

'Cleavage: Men, Women, and the Space Between Us'  
by Jennifer Finney Boyle  
c.2025, Celadon Books  
\$29.00  
256 pages

When it came to friends and family, your cup used to runneth over.

You had plenty of both and then, well, life and politics wedged an ocean-sized chasm between you and it makes you sad. And yet – are you really all that far apart? As in the new memoir, "Cleavage" by Jennifer Finney Boyle, maybe you're still two peas in a pod.

Once upon a time not so long ago, Jennifer Finney Boyle was one of "a group of twelve-year-old Visigoths" intent on mischief. They hung around, did normal boy stuff, setting off rockets, roughhousing, roaming, rambling and bike-riding. The difference between Boyle and the other boys in her group was that Jim Boyle knew she was really a girl.

Then, she vowed that it was a "secret



no soul would ever know," and James went to college, enjoyed a higher metabolism, dated, fell in love too easily, then married a woman and fathered two boys, but there was still that tug. Boyle carried the

child she once was in her heart – "How I loved the boy I'd been!" – but she was a woman "on the inside" and saying it aloud eventually became critical.

Boylan had a hard talk with her wife, Deedie, knowing that it could be the end of their marriage. She's eternally grateful now that it wasn't.

She's also grateful that she became a woman when she did, when politics had little to do with that personal decision. She worries about her children, one who is trans, both of who are good, successful people who make Boyle proud. She tries to help other trans women. And she thinks about the words her mother often said: "Love will prevail."

"Our lives are not a thing to be ashamed of," Boyle says, "or apologized for, or explained. Our lives are a thing of wildness, and tenderness and joy."

Judge "Cleavage" by its cover, and you might think you'll get a primer on anatomy. Nope, author Jennifer Finney Boyle only has one chapter on the subject, among many. Instead, she leans heavily on her childhood and her transition rather late in life, her family, and her friends to continue where her other books left off, to update, correct and to share her thoughts on that invisible division. In sum, she guesses that "a huge chunk of the population...



Jennifer Finney Boyle  
Credit: Dan Haar

still doesn't understand this trans business at all..."


Let that gentle playfulness be a harbinger of what you'll read: some humor about her journey, and many things that might make your heart hurt; self-inspection that seems confidential and a few oh-so-deliciously well-placed snarks; and memories that, well-told and satisfying, are both nostalgic and personal from "both the Before and the After."

This book has the feel of having a cold one with a friend and Boyle fans will devour it. It's also great for anyone who is trans-curious or just wants to read an enjoyable collection of work from a born storyteller. No matter what you want from it, what you'll find in "Cleavage" is a treasure chest. ::

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# The love of art guides artistic leadership in our community

Todd Smith is the executive director of the Bechtler, Adam Santalla is the newly appointed president of ASC



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

In years past, Charlotte's creative arts scene seemed of little importance to the city's power structure. With the dawn of the 21st century, that energy began to change. Today, the Queen City is a place alive with arts and culture, and who better to address that and share their stories than members of our community?

Join us and learn more as we talk with and share the stories of the executive director of the Bechtler Museum of Modern Arts and the president of Charlotte's Arts and Science Council.

## Todd Deshields Smith



Smith: 'I want people to come see an exhibition of incredible paintings ...'  
CREDIT: Facebook

Arriving back in Charlotte as the world was contending with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Todd Smith had his work cut out for him as he took on the role of the Bechtler Museum's executive director. But Charlotte was like an old friend to Smith and his partner, Ben Hood. Twenty-five years ago, Smith was a curator of American art at the Mint Museum's Randolph Road location, already helping

cultivate the touchstones of culture that locals and tourists visiting the area could find only in Charlotte. In the years that followed, Smith experienced different cultural scenes at other centers of art throughout the nation, including Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee and California.

Even when working at various museums in those locations, trips back to Charlotte were common, as Smith's family made the decision to relocate to the Queen City. That allowed the future executive director to experience the city's cultural evolution first hand.

While Charlotte had its fair share of operational turbulence in 2020, Smith was enthusiastic about the prospect of bringing visitors back through the Bechtler's doors that fall season.

"I think from the museum's point of view, we were able to open back up

fully," Smith recalls. "We're seeing our attendance now surpassing what it was prior to the pandemic, and that's due to a number of reasons we can go into. But, you know, I think the museum is in an exceptionally strong place."

"We've increased our exhibitions. We've started to actively acquire works for the collection. We are expanding our educational outreach into the community. And we've expanded our benefits for our members and our donors. So all that together, I think, shows an organization that took advantage of a rethinking during the pandemic that many organizations did to come out of it much stronger and much more focused."

Under Smith's watchful eye over the last five years, the Bechtler has seen an increase in how many special exhibitions could be available to the public at any given time. At the same time, much focus was given to bringing in artistic works that complimented the pieces on display already and in the permanent collection.

One of the biggest challenges the museum has faced is making each exhibit relevant to new generations just discovering art and finding what they identified with. For Smith and company, the solution was to connect the present with the past, linking contemporary artists to historical works and making every piece on view that much more relevant.

An example of this dynamic is evident in an exhibition that is currently on display, *Virginia Jaramillo: Principle of Equivalence*. Smith is exceptionally eager about the opportunity to have Jaramillo's lifetime of work on display for Charlotteans old and new to discover. Born in 1939, she is 85, still working in her craft to this day. That's a fact that clearly connects the past to the present.

"She was born in Texas, Mexican American heritage, lived in LA, lived in New York, lived in Paris, moved back to New York, and just this amazing story of her art, and her dedication to creating throughout her entire life," Smith explains. "And we're the only East Coast venue for this exhibition that was at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at the Kemper Museum in Kansas City. We're fortunate to be able to showcase this collection."

"I want people to have an opportunity to come in and see an exhibition of just incredible paintings that are smart and quiet, and allow themselves a chance to step away from what's happening outside in the world."

If you're looking to make a visit to the Bechtler Museum, Wednesday nights from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. are free entry for anyone

looking for a short getaway.

## Adam Santalla Pierce



Pierce: 'I've always been an arts worker and an arts nerd.'  
CREDIT: Facebook

For artists and arts programs the world over, it can be a bit stressful trying to find ways to make things happen. Thankfully, in Charlotte, there are organizations that lead the charge in helping relieve crucial parts of that stress, whether it is financing or being able to find locations to exhibit. For Adam Santalla Pierce, the newly minted president of the Arts

& Science Council (ASC), those processes are some of his main concerns when helping creative individuals in the city.

Hailing from the D.C. area, Pierce has been involved in performing arts in the Southeast his entire career. Starting off by working at a summer stock theater in Charlottesville, Virginia while attending school, the "truly all hands-on deck kind of effort" that production environments thrive upon wholly captured his own creative sensibility.

From there, his career pivoted back to D.C., working at the Mead Center's Arena Stage for a year. Since his departure from D.C., Pierce made his way to Charlotte, where his introduction to the city started as part of the Blumenthal, which he described at the time as "one of the busiest performing arts centers in the country."

Since that point a decade ago, Pierce has been immersed in various roles at the Blumenthal and at ASC, where he has spent the majority of his professional life, while also making Charlotte a home for himself and his partner, the Reverend Jacob Pierce. From his first role as a program director, he has served as a grant manager, director, and vice president over community and artistic support, all before taking over as interim president in June of 2024 and now serving as president.

During our conversation with Pierce, it became extremely evident his time in the Charlotte arts and creative scene has been a continuing inspiration that drives him to give back to those communities. Since he has been with ASC, the grant programs he has overseen at the organization have more than tripled in returns, allowing more investment potential for creative organizations and

individuals. Take a look: \$446,000 in 2021 to \$1.7 million in 2022. As a result, programs like the upcoming BOOM Festival and Charlotte's Pride Festival are able to provide artists and performers with stages and displays for their ongoing work. While ASC isn't the only hand in these programs, the organization is one of the key tools in Charlotte that allows the general public to be able to access creative spaces all over the city and throughout the year.

"I think as transient as the city is, as many new people are coming to it, day in and day out, there are lots of different kinds of work that could bring somebody to Charlotte," Pierce told Qnotes. "And then I got to come to Charlotte and be an arts worker and work with artists and arts organizations, day in and day out."


"It has been really rewarding in the last three years, especially while ASC was a partner of the Infusion Fund [a Charlotte-based public-private partnership that supports arts and culture] and working with the city and the foundation as a partner in administering the Infusion Fund resources. We were really able to turn up the volume on a lot of the work that we were doing with individual artists."

For 2025, Pierce, along with all-hands at ASC, have hit the ground running with supporting independents in Charlotte's art ecosystem. Already in this fiscal year, in direct comparison to 2017 when Pierce first arrived at ASC, the organization's artist support grant program has gone from 30 to 40 grants within set periods, amounting to around \$40,000, to establishing 97 grants to the collective tune of \$279,000, giving more than double the amount of opportunities for those who otherwise may not have them. There is a new venue and rental assistance program in the works, which will help artists and art organizations alike find ways to bring their visions to the wider world.

Those are just a sampling of what's to come from ASC this year, and Pierce couldn't be more excited for the rest of what is coming up.

"We're building something that is for this community and all of its nuance, and its crazy rapid growth in the deep roots across this community. So, on an intellectual level, I've always been an arts worker and an arts nerd, and coming from [that] background, getting to learn about every artist's different passion and work has made what we do a great learning journey." ::

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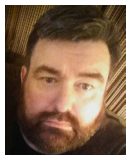
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# Forgotten classic cinema you should know

Beloved divas and queer icons appeared in amazing movies



by David Aaron Moore  
Quotes Staff Writer

Love of film and legendary divas has always been a part of queer culture. Some of these entertainers could dance and sing, while others could deliver a dramatic performance that might make you cry or a comedic punch that left you with abdominal pain from laughing so hard. And some of them could do all of that.

Technology in 2025 makes it possible to have a never-ending source of film and television programming at your fingertips. In fact, there is a tremendous amount of material to choose from. Some of the films listed here are available for streaming, while a few may require purchase of a (gasp!) Blu-Ray or DVD. Whatever the case, they're all worth the effort to hunt them down.

Despite the years that have passed, the film and television industry still shows signs of being forever changed by the COVID pandemic. Many TV series and movies have moved to streaming platforms like Hulu, Netflix and Amazon Prime. Financial challenges have often made big budget releases a thing of the past and creativity is far too often sacrificed to meet the demands for more material with smaller budgets.

If you're bored with what's out there right now, consider taking a look back at some of the films many individuals in our community found meaningful and entertaining during the 20th century.

During that time there weren't very many openly LGBTQ+ role models that were out and open to identify with, so queer folks looked elsewhere and found a host of female entertainers they grew to love, who loved them right back.

Most of them are very well known for one or more particular movies, or a music career. In honor of Women's History month in March, we've decided to take a look at some of the lesser known, but still amazing films these women made that you need to see.

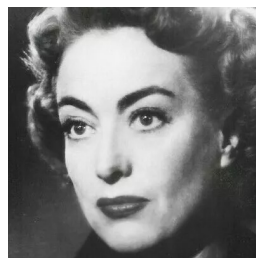
Lucille Ball in "The Big Street" (1942)  
Ball is best known for the television series "I Love Lucy." To experience another side of her acting capabilities, do your best to watch "The Big Street." Staring alongside Henry Fonda, Ball plays a gangster's snobby girlfriend who gets beaten all to hell and ends up an invalid in a wheelchair. Despite Fonda's never-ending love and devotion, Ball treats Fonda like a pariah before she gets what she deserves. It's a big bag of varying emotions that will leave you sad, angry and touched by devotion.

## Rosalind Russell in "The Velvet Touch" (1948)

Russell is best known for the film "Auntie Mame," which is amazing but, you really should check out the film noir classic "The Velvet Touch." This is a serious role for Russell but she still manages to pump in a comic line or two here and there. Playing the part of a Broadway star, she unintentionally and



## Joan Crawford in "Possessed" (1947)



nurse named Louise, Crawford obsesses over a boyfriend who doesn't return her feelings. It's not clear whether she had mental issues before or the experience drives her to madness, but she gets to act her most convincingly crazy in a film role that was nominated for an Academy Award.

## Bette Davis in "The Star" (1952)



Davis had hoped to continue her winning streak in the movie "The Star." Playing a character purportedly based on Joan Crawford, Davis is a down and out movie star who ends up losing everything and is forced to get a job at a department store before quitting after a few snobby store patrons recognizes her. While the film was not a success, it's still extremely entertaining and lots of fun to watch, as Davis hisses and spits her way through practically every scene.

## Judy Garland in "I Could Go on Singing" (1963)



Go on Singing." Filmed entirely in England, Garland stars opposite gay actor Dirk Bogarde as a down and out

unexpectedly gets away with the perfect crime. Throughout the film she battles her inner demons and sense of guilt until it finally gets the best of her.

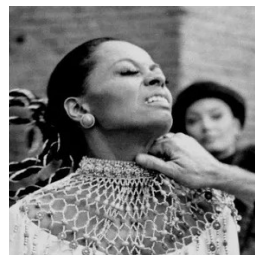
American singer and Broadway actress who wants to reconnect with the son she handed over to Bogarde in order to pursue her career, but Bogarde isn't going for it. Garland pulls out some of her best dramatic stops to win him over and eventually closes the film on stage singing the title theme.

## Barbra Streisand in "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever" (1970)



part science fiction, part tragedy and romantic comedy, it's called "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever." Streisand stars opposite French actor Yves Montand as a fun loving but slightly neurotic young woman in contemporary America who is accidentally hypnotized. This allows psychiatrist and college professor Montand to discover her previous life as a psychically-gifted woman who comes to a life of privilege while living among 17th century British royalty, but not before she's accused of being a witch.

## Diana Ross in "Mahogany" (1975)



In the film, which also stars Billy Dee Williams and Anthony Perkins, Diana Ross plays the title character, who faces discrimination and disdain from various peers and co-workers while she struggles to become a fashion designer, but instead experiences huge success as a model. Perkins (still being cast as a psycho fifteen years after the Hitchcock film), in the role of a well-known and obsessive fashion photographer, loves her then treats her terribly before meeting an untimely demise in a Maserati. Mahogany survives the car crash, achieves her ultimate desires but in the end tosses everything to the curb for the man that she decides was meant for her: Billy Dee Williams. While Williams role pales in comparison to others in the film, he does get the movie's ultimate line: "Success is nothing without someone you love to share it with."

## Madonna in "Desperately Seeking Susan" (1985)

Frequently referred to as a master of



reinvention and definitely the Queen of Pop from the 1980s until the 2010s, Madonna had a prime roll in the movie "Desperately Seeking Susan." Madonna plays a New York

City counterculture opportunist named Susan who is always on the prowl for a new man and new funding. Rosanna Arquette as Roberta lives a boring life in the suburbs and discovers Susan's personal ads and decides to follow her around in an effort to spice up her boring life. Mishaps and mild disasters ensue, but so does happiness and self-realization for all parties involved.

## Cher in "Suspect" (1987)



heart of gold stars opposite a flirtatious and snarky Dennis Quaid in the role of a juror. Together the two face mystery, love and endless peril while attempting (despite breaking countless judicial laws) to save an accused homeless man (Liam Neeson) of murder.

## Bette Midler in "Big Business" (1988)



Business." Midler co-stars in the film with another queer icon and comedic actress, Lily Tomlin. Together the two play two sets of identical twins that get switched up by a bumbling nurse in a mill town at birth. Following the opening scene of the mishap and mix up of newborn infants, we jump forward to the 1980s, where the two sets of mismatched twins finally encounter each other while going head to head over an aggressive corporate shut down of the previously mentioned mill town's main source of income and employment. Despite a boisterously comedic tone (with Tomlin and Midler how could you expect anything less?), it does raise some interesting questions about environment versus genetics and how that impacts the four sisters in later life. ::

# Her “Lucky” days: an interview with Margaret Cho

Comic actress talks about retro-influenced music release



by Gregg Shapiro  
Qnotes Contributing Writer

The year has just begun, but 2025 is turning out to be a fantastic one for queer multi-hyphenate **Margaret Cho**. In January, Cho appeared on “Celebrity Jeopardy” where she left fellow contestants Rachel Brosnahan and Seth Green in her dust, winning more than \$50k for her charity of choice, Friendly House, and advanced to the semi-finals level of competition.

Her successful Live and Livid comedy concert tour, now in its second year, has a selection of new dates. She has numerous movie and TV projects forthcoming. As if that wasn’t enough, Cho is releasing her third music album titled “Lucky Gift.” She spoke with us recently in an interview about the many new things going on in her life.

**Gregg Shapiro: Congratulations on your “Celebrity Jeopardy” appearance which aired a week before this interview. I loved the way you dominated the “Global Pride” category. Margaret Cho:** Thank you [laughs]!

**GS: Then you ultimately advanced to the semi-finals, winning more than \$50,000 for your charity, Friendly House. What was the experience like for you?**

**MC:** That was incredible, because I love the show. I’ve been playing it in my mind for all of this time. It was exciting to actually be on the set and then to meet Ken Jennings and then be able to do what I’ve been fantasizing about for such a long time. I loved being part of that.

**GS: “Lucky Gift” is your third music album. What do you get personally from making music that differs from doing comedy?**

**MC:** It’s just a different form of expression. With comedy you have words, but with music you have instruments, you have chords, you have tones, you have a voice, you have all sorts of different ways to approach art and communicating with music that comedy doesn’t quite do. For me, it’s really gratifying. I also just love to make music. I do it every day anyway, just like I do comedy every day. It’s just a big



Sixties Mod: Margaret Cho’s high fashion look for her period-influenced single “Lucky Gift.”  
CREDIT: Publicity



“Lucky Gift” single cover art.  
CREDIT: Publicity

part of who I am.

**GS: Apart from the title track and “Boyfriend from China,” for which you received sole writing credit, you collaborated with Garrison Starr and Roger Rocha on the remaining tunes. What are the individual attributes of Garrison and Roger that make them good co-songwriters for you?**

**MC:** They’re both, musically, just genius. They have different approaches, and I really love working with both of them. I think they bring out the best in me sonically. The intricacy of Roger’s musicality – he’s phenomenal. Then Garrison comes at the writing with so much heart. She has a direct line to emotional truths with the way that she writes. I’m grateful. They’re very different and unique as artists. I love working with them.

**GS: Do you think you’ll continue to collaborate with Garrison and Roger?**

**MC:** Yes, for sure. Always.

**GS: The keyboards and the handclaps on “Sisyphus” give the song an ‘80s vibe. Of all the music you’ve listened to during your lifetime, where does music from the 1980s rank on your list?**

**MC:** It’s huge! If I were to stick with one era, it would be the ‘80s. I think it was such a great time for music because we had technology really changing the way that musicians were working and writing. Using synthesizers in a different way. Using all sorts of computers in a different way. I love New Wave! I think that era was so powerful. I also have had a chance to work with my favorite artists from the era, whether that’s Blondie, Cyndi Lauper, or Joan Jett on the True Colors Tour.

**GS: I remember seeing that tour in Chicago.**

**MC:** I’m so lucky to be able to have worked with my divas from the ‘80s who

are still amazing. Of course, I think The Go-Go’s are it! That was the first concert that I ever went to and they’re all friends of mine. They’re artists that just keep on giving. They keep on doing it, and I love that.

**GS: I was excited to hear your cover of Freur’s “Doot Doot,” which is not a song that has been covered by many other artists. Why did you choose to include that song?**

**MC:** I love that song! That’s like the ultimate blend of ‘80s technology and the new idea of where we’re going to approach rock and roll. I find that song to be so moving. You can kind of paint any situation onto it. We don’t really know what it’s about. It could be anything, and I love that about that song.

**GS: “Funny Man” and its accompanying music video are a loving tribute to Robin Williams. There’s a line in the song that goes, “you always got my name wrong.” Can you please say something about that?**

**MC:** He thought my name was Margaret Chow, which is so funny. He did so for about 40 years. He had it stuck in his mind that’s what it was. It was so hilarious. I guess he thought I was Italian. I love him. I miss him. I want people to remember him. We don’t talk about his legacy in comedy enough, I think because of the terrifying, uncomfortable way that he decided to leave. This is a good way to remind everybody of him and what he meant. Also, to talk about funny people who don’t necessarily feel great.

**GS: I’m glad you mentioned that because you describe the song as “an anthem to the funny guys who didn’t always feel so funny on the inside.” Do you think there’s a public misconception about the performer they see on stage and what that performer’s life is like off stage?**

**MC:** Yes. I think, especially for

comedians, the idea is that we’re relied upon to be funny and always be on. The fact is that comedy or a sense of humor is a coping mechanism. Oftentimes people are really funny, but they also have a lot to cope with. They have that sense of humor because they’ve had to deal with so much trauma throughout their lives. People have an idea that comedy is about happiness and it’s kind of not. It’s really interesting. I want to spread that idea.

**GS: My personal favorite song on the album is “You Can Be You,” on which you are joined vocally by Garrison Starr. Please tell the readers about how that song came to be.**

**MC:** That song was written on the day that Nex Benedict died. Nex Benedict was a non-binary, gender non-conforming teen from Oklahoma who was failed by the state of Oklahoma, the Board of Education, the students, the teachers and the staff at the school they attended. The incredible inhumanity of people, the constant misgendering, the constant mockery of this young person’s life really made me so angry. I wanted to write a song that spoke to non-binary youth, non-binary teens, queer teens, trans teens who are struggling with the onslaught of homophobia and transphobia from our current administration and the country at large. It’s a terrible time. I wanted to have a song that was speaking to them; that was about letting them be themselves, allowing them to be them. That was a really important thing to me. Embracing pronouns. Embracing the idea that they don’t have to be gender-conforming. You can be yourself. There was such a feeling of hopelessness after Nex’s death, that I didn’t know how to address it. The song is meant for that.

**GS: Your “Live and Livid” tour is now in its second year. Would you say that in early 2025 you are as livid as you were or livider than ever?**

**MC:** I’m so livider. I’m so livided [laughs]! It’s so scary. But I think we have to have more hope than ever. Through humor, there is hope. Laughter is resistance. There’s a way to talk about things so that we can survive that. I’m putting all of my effort into writing about what’s happening, talking about what’s happening. Making sure that we can fight this injustice, this homophobia, this hatred, this transphobia. It’s a nightmare, but I think we have to use humor to get through it.

**GS: Do you plan to incorporate songs from “Lucky Gift” into your show, or are there plans for a separate concert tour?**

**MC:** I want to do something separate. I haven’t exactly figured out what that is. For me, it’s so different, so I would love to try to figure that out. I’m just in the process of doing that. There’s some music shows that I’m doing now and that will expand as we go along. Right now, the record is just coming out, so I want to see what happens. But I definitely want to do music, and of course, comedy. ::



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